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Philes, G.P.

How to read a book in the best way

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HOW TO READ
A BOOK
IN THE BEST WAY.

"THE ENGLISH, WHILE THEY BOTHER US WITH LECTURES, OUSANDS OF
HUNDREDS OF BOOKS; AND I THINK, TO READ THEM, MUCH WASTED."
BUTLER.

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HOW TO READ

A BOOK

IN THE BEST WAY.

"THE COLLEGES, WHILST THEY PROVIDE US WITH LIBRARIES, FURNISH NO
PROFESSOR OF BOOKS ; AND, I THINK, NO CHAIR IS SO MUCH WANTED."
EMERSON.

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"What do we, as a Nation, care about Books? How much do you think we spend altogether on our Libraries, public or private, as compared with what we spend on our horses? If a man spends lavishly on his Library, you call him *mad*—a Bibliomaniac. But you never call one a Horsemaniac, though men ruin themselves every day by their horses, and you do not hear of people ruining themselves by their books. We talk of food for the mind, as of food for the body; now a good Book contains such food inexhaustibly; it is provision for life, and for the best part of us; yet how long most people would look at the best Book before they would give the price of a large turbot for it. Though there have been men who have pinched their stomachs and bared their backs to buy a book, whose libraries were cheaper to them, I think, in the end, than most men's dinners are. A precious thing is all the more precious to us if it has been won by work or economy; and if Public Libraries were half as costly as Public Dinners, or Books cost the tenth part of what bracelets do, even foolish men and women might sometimes suspect there was Good in Reading."—RUSKIN.

WASSEL DONNARD

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CATONIS *Disticha*, lib. iii. v. 17.

HEALTHY READING.

I.—SINGLE THOUGHTS.

You are quite a stranger to me, but you are my fellow-man. What must I say to get you to listen whilst I tell you, in plain English, HOW TO READ A BOOK IN THE BEST WAY? This is what I have first to find out. See, now, if I have met with good success in my search.

Each man owes his own welfare far more to his fellows than to all the rest of the world put together. The growth of all of us is the fullest when we throw ourselves most open to the teaching of others. But we cannot meet with anything like the vast number

of men we want to help us through the manifold needs of the age in which live. We must, then, find something to aid us in the place of a man. This something is a BOOK: by means of the printing-press a man can multiply himself far beyond his common bounds of number, space, and time; he can stretch a helping hand through hundreds of years, over thousands of miles, to millions of his fellow-men; he can tell them all that he has thought and done; he can share with them his deepest insights into nature, man, and God. How cheering, then, it must be to the lover of mankind, to see that there are within the reach of every one many more books than could easily be reckoned, and that more folk read now than at any former time.

Yet, on carefully weighing the almost boundless growth of the means of reading, we see that the good which follows from their use is but slight. This is owing to the very common want of a knowledge—HOW TO READ. There is great lack of sign-posts along the way of reading. Hence it comes that so many hurry on a random race, knowing neither the goal they have to reach nor the reward for which to hope. There are scarcely any who place before themselves the settled aim, to get the highest good from a book, by reading it in the best way; and if they do so, there is no one to tell them what the way is: even in the seats of learning such a guide is not to be found; for, in some

of our universities, it is never hinted that there may be such a thoroughfare as is sought : in others, though many ways are taught, nobody learns to sift the fitness of them, as they are meant to be taken with a blind faith, grounded on naught but the power of the teacher to bias the learner.

As help failed from others, I sought it in myself. Now, I have been a zealous lover of reading from my earliest childhood. I have tried to forward my growth by earnest study, for the full number of years, at two universities. I have had the happiness to meet as friends some of the foremost readers and writers of the day. I have felt, by trial, the ills and losses which afflict the reader who treads the beaten paths to bookish lore. At last, however, I have found a way easy and swift to travel. I must now make all haste to show this way to others.

To this end, I call for the help of the printing-press, the mightiest engine which one man can wield. That great power, which, when uncontrolled, broods over a murky wilderness of ink, and floods each brain with a shapeless mist of thought, I now beseech to aid me in uttering, openly to all, the means whereby the clouds of night, in which it has hitherto dwelt, may be swept together from the clear blue sky, and made to fall in fruitful rain. What I have sought is, how are we to become skilled in the use of the tools and weapons

forged for the mind in the printing-house. How are we to handle them so as to win most brightly in our toil and strife? The cleverest agricultural machine that tills a country in a day, the most dreadful arm of the modern artillery that whitens our cheek as we are told of its power—both of these are merely huge playthings in the hands of those who have not been taught their use. And a few loose whimsies about the matter are not enough. Unless we can point, as well as load our cannon, they only serve to hinder us on our march. In what belongs to the world of nature, all this is stale. We have plenty of guides to the use of all natural machinery. Yet the largest of our mental workshops hums every hour with toil, and no man tries to teach us the use of what is wrought. It is true, we have with books their prefaces and introductions; but these tell us, at the most, barely what is the aim of the book, not how to use it, so as to reach the end in view. This neglect of a guide to the use of books is a grievance of a very old standing. We find it dates from the revolt against authority, and the enthronement of individual opinion which started with the Reformation, and soared its loftiest flight in rationalism.

Perhaps it is hinted that the grievance can be but small, as the end sought in reading is most trifling. Books are only makeshifts for men; they are therefore

worth a great deal less than their writers. Now among men we very seldom find a pure yearning towards the welfare of their brethren, and we often fail to discover any leaning whatever to such a bounteous mood. The commonplace mates of our daily life are not often gifted with the highest of heads or the noblest of hearts. Nor were it fitting that they should be so. The uncommon is in general better suited to be pointed at with the finger of amazement than to be taken into the hand for use. The very thing which stamps a man as common is that which gives their greatest worth to his like. It is their number makes them common, but it is also their number that gives them weight. A single brick is not worth a farthing, yet who can reckon the cost of a city? Very few individual men are worth a step to see. The every day kind of men pull us about quite enough, without our needing to go out of our way to meet them. We should only lose our time if we did. We do not go far to look for a stone—to see a huge boulder or an Alp, we will travel for weeks. The truly mighty man is worth any amount of study; with books the case is much the same, but worse, for nature teaches us how to follow men, but not how to read books. Of by far the greater number of writings each is quite unfitted for sober study by itself; while those aimed at our highest well-being, and thus deserving most

earnest reading, are very few, and even they are put into our hands without a hint of how to use them. Fitting out in haste for the voyage of life, we have to choose between a boat without an oar, and a ship without a helm.

Since then it happens that most of us follow the author in the dark, can we wonder if many folks look with dislike upon any one who busies himself earnestly with books? Yet their gibes are too sweeping when they sneer at all such as bookworms.

To those that make the books is chiefly due the barrenness of those that handle them. Inability to bring forth fruit has sprung, as it often does, from the unbounded abuse of means which were given to be knowingly and soberly dealt with, in order to come at ends foreseen. It is the authors who are to blame for withholding what was needed to save the unknowing from those excesses into which they are so apt to plunge. These unrighteous distillers of mental draughts have brewed of the strongest, and sold without stint to the weakest. In this they have yet to learn their duty. A man has no right, in our day, to hurl a book into the world without one tittle of foresight. It was formerly otherwise. A man then wrote for the chosen few who were learned. Now he writes for the crowd, for every one who likes to buy or borrow his book. With other belongings have come other

duties. An author cannot now take it for granted that those for whom he works know how to employ what is wrought. But the makers of books still do their jobs as if this were so. There is clearly therefore a great gulf between the authors and the public. This I shall now try to span, feeling sure that the mental engineering of the day is fully able to meet our real wants.

Let us seek from the practical engineer a hint of the worthiest path to follow. His words are these: Wrest from nature the hidden clue to the road she travels: you wish to create new worlds of thought; study then the manner in which the old world of matter is framed in your minds: you desire to cover your mental nakedness; see how God puts on the living garment of the universe.

In following this advice, let us cast back our eyes upon our earliest childhood. Sweetly and softly does the All-mother rock the cradle of our new-born mind. Gently she cares that we be not blinded by the sudden flashing in upon us of the outer world. Mist-clouds are endlessly swaying around the dawn of our mental powers. As they are slowly riven, how bright are the tints of the earliest sights we behold! surely the leaf was then more green, the snow more white, the night more dark, the wind more boisterous than it has ever been again. Many a time since then have we gazed with pleasure upon the loveliness of the material

universe, but seeing it so often, it seems not near as bright. If we had to paint a landscape to our mind's eye, where should we find such dazzling colors as in the storehouse of our earliest remembrances.

We are struck not only with their clearness, but also with the want of any links to tie them into one. Each little thing that happened stands forth boldly and alone, alike without others going before and coming after. That day we were out walking, we never seemed to have started, and never to have turned towards home. That lightning-shattered tree is all that we marked in our long day's ride. That fearful plunge of the ship brings our little hand, stretched over the bulwark, almost within the reach of one of the mightiest waves in the world, an Atlantic wave. But the vessel seems to hang still at that slippery angle, and never to have righted herself again. That house, where the poor madman lived, and hurled from the window the bricks of his fireplace at the passers-by, is still a house of dread to us, although we dwelt in the neighborhood long years after he was gone, and his howlings had died away for ever. But one night's family hymn is ever winding its way upstairs to our little cot, where we are early put to bed with a mother's kiss.

Such memories as these are common to us all in our first instinctive days. As the veins of the past

yield a richer ore, we can call back more various mental feelings, but all our wonderings, longings, joys and fears, go still with jerks before us. How lively was the play of our fancy! Every thought was clothed as in robes of light. A book was not read but lived through. We were never stopped by the unlikelihood of the story. We looked for wonderful lamps and enchanted maidens in our daily walks. Our talk with our bosom friends was of wild adventures in strange lands. The real and the ideal were mingled all in one. The lamp of reason was not yet lighted from the torch of instinct. We are busied with feeling and thinking individual things without and within ourselves. These thoughts are called *Concepts* by those who are learned in the dead tongues. They are the single threads to be hereafter woven into the web of knowledge. The growth of *Concepts* is the leading mark of our mental whereabouts in this, the first stage of our mind's life.

Soon a change is near, and the sign is this. Scene follows scene with an ever-quickenning speed. We almost lose our steadiness, in the seemingly-endless round. The giddy whirl fevers our brain for a time; but this spinning that never stops wearies us at last. We can no longer note each change that flits before us. We must hold on by something that is fixed, or we shall fall. Let us try to grasp that which for a

little does not alter. Bewildered with the unlike, let us cling to what is alike in several of the hurrying crowd of thoughts. What need of more food from our feelings until what we have already swallowed has become part of ourselves? Let us know what we have felt. Let us pair our single thoughts, and say that such and such are alike, or unlike. This saying is, by the learned, called a Proposition. In the proposition, two or more single thoughts are joined in the bonds of wedlock. Let us hope for a blessing on our new-made family ties. Let us lighten their days by shedding on them without stint the sunbeams of our reason. After waiting a little the brood begins to come. Who cannot call to mind that wondrous time, when the current coin of his thoughts first began to bear his own image? Can he ever forget how hard he had to struggle not to speak? Shaking of the voice and quivering of the nerves are present at the birth-throes of our own mind, and, when brought forth, how beautiful are our offspring! Were ever children like to ours?

Until the end of the second stage of knowledge and theory, we nourish them ourselves; but the time comes when they must be turned out to look for their living. The word must mould the world. We are tired of knowing, and we wish to do. It seems to us now that one deed is worth a whole lifetime of theory. We

are eager to put our hand to whatsoever we can find to do. Our ability to act seeks the air in every way, for we are much hemmed in, and this hemming in is pain. The beginning of this third period is the most painful halt in our lives.

Indeed, so much courage is wanted to lead one to make a trial of passing through the third stage, and the risk of breaking down is so great, that few get as far as the start. We must call to mind, that although there is great likelihood of a crash if we go on, it must come if we pull up hard. A man cannot back out of being answerable for doing a good deed, by putting its fulfillment out of his power. Cutting off our right hand would not free us from the duty of feeding our helpless babes. Yet many have sunk and died on the road of duty. If their death mounds lie thick on our right hand and on our left, let them be to us as finger-posts to keep us closer to the narrow path that leads through the valley of the shadow of the great change of thought into deed. Look, O trembling theorist, at the lovely hills beyond. They are the means of pleasurable activity. The faces of those walking on them, shine as with a glory. Know that it comes of healthful exercise. On, then, onward still!

We must, then, time after time, try our powers on something that we long to do. Again and again we will miss our aim. Then a slight stroke of good luck

falls to our lot. It gives us a thrilling glimpse of what may yet be done. In the end we find for our ability plenty of room to work. In making the most of it, we reach at length that painless, or even pleasant stage, in which the daily task we have thoroughly mastered becomes, as it were, a part of ourselves.

The sun of our reason has shone from one side. Now its rays light up the other. Our ability to work upon the world is steadily lessening. In the same way as we opened out, we now draw back within ourselves. We again seek to help the growth of knowledge. But this time it is of a knowledge of the deeds which were called forth by our foregoing knowledge of the thoughts. Our experience of action we blend together in rules, or maxims. Has not old age the allowed right to point the way, and to warn the straggler? How calmly do we now look upon the toils and trials of others! how worthless seem the struggles of the outer world to our inner realm of peace! The men of the world are painfully finding out their bounds by rudely knocking up against them. The ever renewed feeling, that they are hemmed in, is to them a curse. We have lived through it all, long, long ago. How very young it all seems to us! Our trials have taught us so well the lengths of our tethers, that we never run so far to be pulled up with a jerk. They never hurt us, for we move without

tightening them ; in fact, we never feel our bonds. This is bliss. And although we are being wrapped in for our last sleep, we scarce take note of a precaution so gentle. It is true, when first our leaves began to drop, we started as we heard them rustle. Now, their same-sounding fall is only Nature's lullaby, softly inviting us to slumber. And let us hope, that when we cast our latest look upon the clouds that curtain in our setting sun, they will glow with the ruddy pledge of a good day on the morrow.

We have now seen the four great stages of the growth of man's mind. It would be easy to sketch the same in the growth of mankind. But enough has been already said to guide us in finding **HOW TO READ.**

II. COMMON THOUGHTS.

I. LET US START BY LAYING DOWN, THAT WE WANT TO READ A BOOK SO AS TO GET AS MUCH GOOD FROM IT AS WE CAN ; TO MASTER AND USE IT ; NOT ONLY TO SWALLOW IT, BUT TO MAKE IT PART OF OURSELVES, AND THEREBY STRENGTHEN ALL OUR POWERS. WHAT WE WISH TO FIND IS, HOW IT MAY BE CHANGED IN SHAPE SO AS TO BECOME MOST LIKE TO THE REST OF US. IN FACT WE ASK, HOW ARE WE TO FEED OUR MINDS ?

As nature feeds us. By observing how we acquire a knowledge of the Book of Nature, we find the first hints sought toward the proper handling of any human book. When we try to forward our own growth, we must shape our course after the labors of Nature in the same line. Our way of studying the little world of a book must be likened to that by which we grasp the mighty world in which we live.

II. WE MUST HAVE A FIXED AIM WHEN WE READ A BOOK.

The test of our deeds, for good or for ill, is what we will to do. If we have no aim in doing anything, it cannot bear much fruit. And whatever aim we have must be single, for it is much the same whether we try to aim at a number of things at once, or at none at all.

III. EVERY BOOK, FROM WHICH WE SEEK THE CHIEFEST GOOD, SHOULD BE READ AS OFTEN AS THERE ARE ENDS IN VIEW WHICH ARE NOT ALIKE.

It is no use trying to do two things at once, and both in the best way. Now, we have seen that Nature perfects us in four stages, wholly unlike each other. In the first two, the road leads inward; and in the second two, outward. The first stage is marked by the growth of single thoughts, called Concepts; the second by a knowledge of how our thoughts stand to one another, called Theoretical Cognition, and summed

up in Propositions ; the third, by deeds, or will and desire, called Conation ; the fourth by a knowledge of how our deeds are linked together, called Practical Cognition, which takes the shape of maxims, rules or precepts.

IV. WE SHOULD, THEREFORE, READ A BOOK FOUR TIMES, WITH THESE FOUR AIMS :

First to see clearly the author's meaning ;

Second, to fix his propositions in our minds, by tabulating them ;

Third, to practice them in the cases he gives, and in others chosen by ourselves ;

Fourth, to make precepts to guide us by what follows from our trials ; and to judge, or criticise the book, pointing out both the good and the bad.

FIRST READING.

Before beginning a book for the first time, we know not what is held therein. Were it opened to our eyes at once we could not seize the whole. We must thus draw near to a knowledge of it step by step, as page after page is turned. As the panorama begins to be unrolled, we faithfully observe each scene. By and by our power of observation lessens, and without a hearty screwing up, our mind gets slack, and we are landed at the end of the book in a rayless jumble of ideas.

Instead of calmly laying down the volume with an overpowering belief that we have taken the first step toward making it a part of ourselves, we dash it from us, and rush to seek elsewhere to tighten the muscles of our mind, or to disburden our overloaded shoulders.

SECOND READING.

Allowing, however, that we have been able fully to keep up to the last with the author's meaning, we are then glad to ease the fixedness of our gaze, by studying how the thoughts we have just won stand to each other. The author is the magician of the present day. His scrolls, to be truly worthy, must be written with a large outflow of living might, or as they said of old, with his blood. If this be so, the reading of our modern spells brings up before us more spirit forms than ever Magian power dreamt to call forth. But what must we do with our ghostly crowd? We cannot think of letting them go, in the very moment they have come to meet us. We have many things to ask them. We must gauge themselves and their belongings. We must link them together in the bond of the Proposition. And we must make up for what we lose from their fleeting nature by writing down what we

have witnessed. These ends we keep before us in reading the book for a second time.

THIRD READING.

Anything that stops us while we are a-doing gives us pain. Want of knowledge bars us in many a deed. Now this hindrance is moved away, and we are able to seek pleasure where alone it is to be found, in the free use of our powers. On first trying to bring single cases under our propositions which embrace the whole, we get but a short way ahead, and meet with but little good luck. We steadfastly toil on. The hard places overcome, give us to know our own might, which strides wider with every stumbling-block overstepped. At length our going on is so rapid it seems as if there were nothing we durst not undertake. This is, however, but a sham, and it does not stand the test of an enlarged number of trials, which we do not forget to make.

FOURTH READING.

We then know both our weak and our strong points, and accordingly draw up a set of precepts, pointing out what we may hopefully try to do, and how to handle it in the best way. We can now also see unmistakably

bly where the author has slumbered, and where there is proof of wakeful labor in what he has overcome. We are thus fully able to show up both his beauties and his blemishes; in fact, to criticise him. For we are rightly busied with criticism at the last stage, whereas many of us wrongly try to bring it in at the very first. This is a great mistake, as the fullest growth of criticism can only be reached after we have practiced the author's leading thoughts in the way he seeks to teach. We find, accordingly, that the surest proof we have read a book in the best way is, not a wish to cut it up, but a desire to write one of our own to the same end.

Lastly, let it be noted, that the foundations which have been laid for the study of one book are still more needed in a plan for reading many books. This plan will help us to choose the easiest way—namely, that leading from the more simple to what is less so. But what is more simple at one stage of our reading is less so at another. We must, therefore, change our standpoint to suit our seasons. Let it be enough to call to mind the observation, that in early life we have most to do with particulars, and, at a later time, with general ideas. To enlarge further on this head would seem to lead us in the study of the matter read, rather than the manner of reading it. Such discussion would be out of place here, being kept back, all save a few

hints in the next chapter, for another short guide-book that will tell us what to read.

V. We observe in each of the four stages, the one that goes before is swallowed up in the one coming after, but not destroyed. We are thus led to give ear to a truly conservative criticism, which enjoins on us not to seek to remove the old, save by taking it kindly to ourselves, and making it wholly our own. We thus change its shape. We then modestly bring it out under its new form. We do not hoot at the fashion it had before, as it must once have been suitable for the season, or it would never have been worn. But now the times are changed. That is all. There is for us in this world no good which is ever good and all good. We can only hope to find that in which the good stands farthest before the evil. Let us call to mind that a high test of the good is, that it is. The mere being of a thing unmistakably shows, that it is more fitted than unfitted to its belongings, and that, therefore, the good therein overbalances the evil. In the use of this touchstone we must only take heed we do not forget, that we may look at the same thing from many stand-points. The three great observatories of mankind are the Body, the Mind and the Soul ; which three link us with Nature, Self and God. Our warning when given as to these three is only this : never forget from which stand-point you are looking, nor fancy that

what is observed to be true from the one holds also when looked at from the other; beware of reasoning that because a man is healthy in his body he is therefore in good health spiritually; or, because his mind shines brightly, he must, therefore, be well and strong bodily, and so on. Let us stretch our reasoning from one stand-point at a time. This is all the more needful, as the power of spreading out healthily in every way, bodily, mentally and spiritually, is the rarest of all.

VI. This spreading out of our powers, if free, is the source of Pleasure; if checked, of Pain.

Our abilities expand by exercise, and the means of that exercise are afforded by our bounds. Were we perfectly free there would be nothing for us to do. But were our bounds entirely removed we should run clean away. We could, no more than a reservoir, exist without a constant damming up. Now, the use of our powers is threefold:—*First*, in removing our bounds farther away, so as to give us more room and greater freedom for exercise. This spreading out, or expansion, gives us what may be called Positive Pleasure. *Secondly*, we may employ our powers by hedging ourselves in. The pleasure that accompanies this narrowing, or contraction, may be called Negative. *Thirdly*, we may content ourselves with moving peacefully within our bounds, whatever they may be. This

calm life is Blessedness. And since we are gifted with foresight and aftersight, as well as the power of seeing what stares us in the face, it follows that pleasure is not limited in time to the period of actual activity of our powers.

Again, if the hindrances overcome are little we feel glad and show it with smiles. We are sorry for our trivial failures, and show it by tearfulness. These are the many twinkling wavelets which chase one another over the surface of the sea of life on a day of sun and showers. If our difficulties are great they give rise either to joy or grief. Joy is the tall wave leaping to the sky ; grief is its trough, plunging in the deep, all on a growing day of boisterous weather. To overcome the trifling hindrances is the chief aim of the microscopic care of the puny, creeping dwarf of a man, with his small eyes, narrow chest, weak head and faint heart. Glorious victories are reserved for the large-eyed, broad-shouldered, far-striding, great-minded man of might. He is a joyous soul, for nothing comes amiss to him. He is equal to all his foes. And who are they but the grim giants of Falsehood, Hatred and Despair? Hark to the clear-ringing war cry that bursts from his heroic chest! See him leap exulting to the fray! Mark well the proud carriage of that noble head! Behold the beaming eye, which, like the sun, never looked upon a shadow !

At home there awaits him a woman, great in her heart as he in his head. She is indeed his equal, for no true man is ever irresistibly determined to wed until he meets his equal among women. He has found his match in one who overflows with loving kindness. To him is her desire, for is he not her husband? And is she not the mother of his children? Towards him she ever casts her fondest glance. To others she is dark and cold. But he and she are one in love.

III. DEEDS.

The practice of what is taught is always best left to the good sense and taste of the learner himself. This is now done, with two or three hints as to what he should read.

Let him at first follow the way now opened, in reading some work worthily acknowledged to be great as a whole. He must begin his training with a discipline that will strengthen all his nature, and not with a few tricks cunningly planned to forward the growth of particular muscles. Having made sure of a healthy activity in every line, he cannot look too narrowly to the utmost advancement of each kind of ability in its turn.

Again, many books are unfitted by the aim of those who wrote them for being read in the best way. These authors never intended their works to be grafted on to the readers. Such, among many others, are all light books, as of sports and pastimes; cram-books, the fruits of the thickening and tabulation, which properly wind up the Second Reading alone; books to be dipped into, as encyclopedias and dictionaries; pamphlets of the day; newspapers of the hour, and so on. Yet, however unfitted a book may be for being read in the best way, a man will nevertheless get more good by taking it in that way than in any other. It is, indeed, very difficult to find a book truly worth the trouble of reading as a good book ought to be read. Lest this should hinder any one from making a trial, it is well for him to bear in mind, that a worthless book read four times will do him less harm, and more good, than four worthless books read once.

IV. WISDOM.

The maxims about Reading are divided into three kinds, according as their chief aim is the good of the BODY, the MIND or the SOUL.

THE BODY.

I. READ OFTEN ALOUD.

This is almost the only way in which reading can be made to work for good upon the body itself. Otherwise we must look to the mind and soul, which are so closely joined with the body that the welfare of each is a common good to all. Indeed, the lower mental powers, such as the fancy, are so nearly linked with the body, that it cannot be healthy unless they meet with plenty of exercise.

The next three maxims are such as debar us from being ill, rather than lead us to be well.

II. IN ORDER TO REST THE EYES, CHIEFLY IN READING AT NIGHT, SHUT THEM NOW AND THEN FOR A FEW MINUTES.

III. RISE SOMETIMES FROM YOUR SEAT. WALK ONCE OR TWICE ROUND THE ROOM, BREATHING IN AND OUT, LONG AND DEEPLY. DO THIS AT LEAST ONCE IN THE HOUR.

IV. FROM TWO EDITIONS OF THE SAME BOOK, PRETTY MUCH ALIKE IN OTHER RESPECTS, CHOOSE THAT IN THE LARGER AND CLEARER PRINT.

THE MIND.

I. TRY TO BELIEVE IN THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK YOU READ, THAT HE HAS SOMETHING TO TEACH, AND IN THE WAY OF READING YOU FOLLOW, THAT IT WILL ENABLE YOU TO LEARN WHAT IS TAUGHT.

The first thing needed for success in any search is a belief that the means used will enable us to get what we want. This belief is not reached all at once. There comes at first but a dim foreshadowing that we may perhaps be able to do something or other. We then make numerous trials. But our hopes are only in part fulfilled. We are, however, led to think that we shall succeed in the end. Each step forward is followed by doubled toil, and this by pleasure as our abilities become more free with exercise. We are thus persuaded that nothing can keep us from the end we put before us at starting. This persuasion sends the blood dancing through our veins in wildest glee. Filled with high-flown zeal, brimful of love, we feel at length that the world we live in is our own.

So it is with the search after knowledge and wisdom in books. A book is as we treat it. We ought in the beginning to pet the author; to give way to a fellow-feeling with him; to laugh if he tickles us, weep.

if he wants us to mourn, and so on. We should be guided by his will—in fact, become like little children. This is all the more necessary in the present day, when then the mental activity has become so very self-conscious, that every book is written with a definite aim. This marks the adult period in the growth of mankind who have ceased to be chiefly animals. The unconsciousness of boys is no more the healthy attitude of the man, than birds-nesting is his natural amusement.

Yet the inflowing from the book is not an end, but must in its turn bring an outflowing into play. If not, we are either choked offhand, or we linger on, inflated or unwieldy. The same ebb and flow is illustrated in our bodies. Matter works on us from without inwards. Life works in us, outwards. Unless each nearly balanced the other we should soon cease to be what we are. If the inward forces were too powerful they would only destroy one another, and our frame would be stiffened in the outset; just as the cell, when its growth is stopped, passes into the crystal. If, on the other hand, the outgoing forces overmatched the others, or worked too long, the springs of our life would be dried up. In either case death, that great change of shape, would be wrought in us before its fitting season.

We must then take care, that while we begin our

reading by laying ourselves open to our author, we end it by doing for others what he has done for us.

II. IF THE BOOK YOU TAKE UP IS ABOUT SOMETHING WITH WHICH YOU ARE FAMILIAR, RUN OVER IN YOUR MIND, AND, BETTER STILL, WRITE DOWN WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW BEFORE STARTING. ON ENDING THE STUDY OF THE BOOK, SETTLE HOW FAR YOU HAVE ADDED TO YOUR STOCK OF KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM. CLOSE YOUR ACCOUNTS WITH THE AUTHOR IN THE USUAL BUSINESS FORM OF DEBIT AND CREDIT.

III. ON THE FIRST READING OF A BOOK THE EASIEST THING TO TRY AT IS TO UNDERSTAND THE AUTHOR'S MEANING.

The first reading should enable you to do this. For the oftener you read a book the less power you have to fix your mind on the mere concepts of the author, if they have once been mastered. Man not being a machine, it is anything but easy for him to do even the simplest thing over and over again. If, then, you cannot follow the meaning throughout the book, you must narrow the space overspread, and treat this smaller bit in the same way as you should the whole. If the first reading of even a small part does not give you a clear understanding of what you have read, go over it again with the same aim.

There precepts are equally applicable to each of the

three following stages. Having, at last, mastered all the parts individually, end by reading the book as a whole.

IV. Do not skip passages every now and then, like a small boy picking currants out of his halfpenny cake. Pay a little more regard to the author's ideas of what is good for you.

V. When reading, pause often for a few minutes to make sure that you have compassed the aim you put before yourself in going through the passage just ended. Bear in mind that you slacken your hold as you widen your grasp.

VI. Read with a pencil and a piece of paper for notes. Fold the paper down about half an inch at the top, so that when stuck in the book it may not slip through. When any idea comes up in your own mind, not belonging to the aim you have in view at the time being, make a note of it and mark the passage in the book with one, two, three or four dots, in a horizontal row, according to the number of the stage with which the idea is most closely linked, whether that of concepts, propositions, practice or precepts.

VII. Copy out your notes, putting more to them each night, in ink. Give at least an hour to this kind of work, just before going to bed. If so much time cannot be spared, then less must do; but rest not

while none is given to this most worthy record of your day's observations.

VIII. OBSERVE CAREFULLY BY WHAT PASSAGES OF THE BOOK YOU ARE MOST STRUCK.

They belong either to what you have lived through, or to what you are about to experience. The former spread before you the traces of what you have been. Now that you can look at them calmly, be sure that you learn of them wisdom. The latter unveil the weaknesses of what you will be. Guard against these at the fitting season. You may safely trust your natural bias to lead you to choose as patterns the graces you chiefly lack. To further the growth of these you must give the most of your pains.

IX. DO NOT BE DRIVEN TO READ ANY BOOK THAT ANYBODY MAY HAPPEN TO RECOMMEND TO YOU.

We have just seen that a man is most struck by the mirroring of his own past and his own future. These please him in a book. But for no two of us are they the same, nor even for any one of us, a few days together. So unlike are they and we, that very often one man feeds on what would kill another.

X. DO NOT EXPECT ANY GOOD FROM ONE READING UNLESS YOU WERE FORMERLY FAMILIAR WITH WHAT THE BOOK IS ABOUT. IN THAT CASE YOU DIP INTO THE BOOK MORE FOR THE SAKE OF STUDYING ITS MANNER THAN ITS MATTER.

XI. BE NOT DISCOURAGED IF THE GOOD FRUITS OF YOUR READING ARE NOT RIPENED AT ONCE.

The more time anything takes in learning the longer it lasts. The toadstool is the growth of a night; the oak of a century. Untimely curiosity to see what will be brought forth, is a fruitful source of misery. We can always make ourselves unhappy at any moment by thinking of what we have not yet attained. The means of our unhappiness are in our own hands. To restrain ourselves from having recourse to them, we must live chiefly in the present, but by faith. Leave to the past the burial of its own corpses.

XII. Fear nothing from the narrowness and precision of the way pointed out.

The fastest traveling is on railways. And besides, even if the discipline be irksome, this only serves as a wholesome check to excess of reading, and leads to a diligent use of the natural safeguard against its ills. This safeguard is writing or composition. And the surest proof that a book has been read in the best way, is a desire to write one like it of our own.

THE SOUL.

There is one BOOK which ought to be the first that is read in the BEST WAY. This way of reading is well fitted to the spirit of those holy pages which teach us

ledge of deeds by the aim or bias of the doer. Others
 seek not much good for the soul in reading. It
 is the body and the mind which may discover in this
 world all that is wanted for their growth. The soul
 belongs not to the earth. There is only one Sunday
 in the week. Yet that blessed day gives us time
 enough to learn that the thirst of knowledge and wis-
 dom is a pitiless fiend, which hunts a man to his grave.
 When its onward fury dies with its victim. Not a
 thing can he take with him into the next world to hide
 from his bodily or his mental nakedness; but

“Love never faileth.”

PART SECOND.

UNHEALTHY READING.

Having pointed out the way of healthily following literary studies, I must now seriously handle some of the more common of the vast number of cases, in which reading has led to disease, and become a curse instead of a blessing. It is our weary doom to learn as much by failure as by success. The wise man gains wisdom from the sight of his brother's fall. And let his fallen brother comfort himself with the thought that if he has left behind him only a ruin half-buried in the sand, the heaps of rubbish will at least hinder any other from trying to build on the same treacherous foundation. The barren tree may be good for fuel. The most rueful tatterdemalion can at least take the post of a scarecrow. Let no man dream that the least bit of work is ever lost. There is no such thing as toiling in vain. The unknown thinker shakes the air that circles round the world of mind, in the full measure of the ability of his thought, and this as surely as on

who is observed of all. He who is not spared to scale the wall may yet help to fill up the ditch with his body. High honor to the workers who are unacknowledged by the crowd! The foundations of the mightiest buildings are unseen. It is with foam that the wave is crowned. The greatest powers are withheld from view. Their paths are hidden in the deep, and clouds of darkness are their dwelling-place.

But if I thrust far from me the worldly touchstone of success, what do I place before you in its stead?

A test that never fails; a standard that needs not a following crowd to make it worthy. It is the test of the thing itself.

In the world without, and in the world within, everything is to itself a law. Each must with itself be at one; unto itself most like. The same must hold of its belongings to others. With them it must agree as with itself. That like draws to like is a law of Universal Gravitation. It holds of both matter and mind, though it is only in the case of material things that the attraction has been measured. Love and Gravitation are one and the same. This is the burthen of the hymns of those whose schools embrace the extremes of modern philosophy. This is to the outer crowd of gaping animals, a jargon; to the inner few, a truism. So, too, it is with all other self-supported dogmas.

The agreement, or harmony, with self, and with

not self, is the healthy, the beautiful, the true, and the good. When of some part there is too much, or too little, or none at all, the want of harmony which arises is disease, ugliness, falsehood and evil. Now we find that too little and none at all of any one thing go hand-in-hand with too much of another; and that too much of one is generally accompanied by too little of all the rest. Unusual growth in one way is generally a token of a like shrivelling up in the others. Enlargement, and lessening, stretching and shrinking are names we give to the same, according to the way in which it is viewed. Whether we begin to travel eastward or westward round the earth, we shall, by going on as we set out, come back to our starting point. Yet, in the two cases, we should at like times pass through points diametrically opposite. While opposite paths lead to the same, we also reach opposite points by starting from the same. This twofold beginning shows that steadiness is only found where the bias is the same each way. This observation belongs to everything that is, and might be fully worked out in a learned treatise, but not in a few lines intended to be popular.

I now go on to apply the test of Harmony to show the sad plight of most readers. Their cases are classified according to what each exhibits in excess or defect. And as the ills are magnified when many books

are read in the same wrong way, it is easier and more striking as a warning to point out these magnified forms.

I. THE CASE OF A MAN WHO DOES NOT READ AT ALL.

This old-fashioned creature may get on very well with savages like himself, but he is quite out of keeping with the civilized men of the present day. This want of agreement is a two-fold source of ills. The individual of barbarous habits suffers all the unpleasantnesses of the present time without its advantages. Nor has he even the opportunities of a former period. The young British scholar of the time of the Druids had no books to read, for their doctrine was strictly forbidden to be written, lest it should be commonly known, but he had twenty years to learn by word of mouth a much shorter body of doctrine than our University man now masters in one-tenth of the time. It is objected that what they did learn in those ancient days they learned well. So they may, for they had the means. These we have not now. We cannot get lectured on the same narrow field for a score of years. Nor do we rub so long or so roughly against nature or man as they did in those days. At a later period the theatre and the coffee-house made up for the want of books on familiar subjects. Now, neither is frequented. The artificial barriers against our fel-

lows are many, but so are our artificial aids to intercourse with them. Though more time is required for the management of our bread-and-butter business, we can, with the help of books, employ what remains more profitably than our ancestors could. Besides, the knowledge of the wild man, if deeper than ours, was not nearly so accurate. What we lose in one way we gain in another. But the loss is compulsory, while the gain is optional. Those in our times who do not read are compelled to put up with the modern restraints on mutual intercourse, while denying themselves the only means of compensation which are offered.

II. THE CASE OF A MAN WHO MERELY READS FOR AMUSEMENT.

He is content to follow the meaning of the author, but seeks not knowledge. He is satisfied to call forth a flow of affection, but suffers it not to pass into deeds. Pleasure is for him an end and not a means. He seeks to put asunder what nature hath joined. Such are the voracious devourer of novels and the mawkish sentimentalist. These are the mental glutton or drunkard, and the victim of mental pollution. The first is afflicted with all the symptoms of indigestion. And no wonder, when his food is an endless surfeit of sweets. His jaded appetite is spurred into an unsound activity by a ceaseless variety of delicacies.

The more he reads, the more he wants to read. So, too, it is with the victim of mental pollution, whose case is all the more wretched when treated with books. For the great objection to books is their one-sidedness. There is no reciprocity between the author and the reader, as there is between man and man. It is all take and no give. Thus the pleasure we obtain by mere reading is meanly selfish, and utterly devoid of loving kindness. The wretched man who seeks only his own pleasure in reading, is soon made bitterly aware of the grossness of his sin in neglecting the happiness of others. This terrible self-consciousness bars him from the world with bolts of steel, and binds him to himself with links of adamant. He dare not look a fellow-man in the face lest the fearful secret should be guessed, how he fails in his duty to mankind. The fruitful loveliness of nature is to him a cruel mockery; the thought of God a frightful spectre, that haunts him even in his narrowest and darkest hiding-place. He is repelled from every side, even from the inside. For where will he find a more sickening object than himself? And on himself he wreaks a terrible revenge. He is his own tormentor. On his own debased countenance he stamps a life-long warning to others not to pursue pleasure for itself alone. Woe unto you that set your heart upon dreams that are not your own !

These poor wretches grub deep for their misery. There is one akin to them who finds a shallower sorrow. This disease is mental childishness. With everything he wants to play. A book is to him a toy, so he reads only the comic. His talk is chaff. He is always sniggering. His ideal is the funny man. This grinning and chattering idiot suffers less than the others. His illness is, like himself, little and contemptible. It goes by the name of seediness, that sure sign of a man of petty aims. If people only knew how unmistakably this complaint proclaims their silliness and weakness, their want of sober-mindedness, earnestness, zeal and all high qualities, they would not so often confess to feeling seedy.

III. THE CASE OF A MAN READING WITHOUT ANY CLEAR AIM TO DO HIMSELF GOOD IN A FIXED WAY, BUT MERELY FOR THE SAKE OF READING; OR, TO SAY THAT HE HAS READ SO AND SO; OR, TO PASS THE TIME.

The reading thus becomes an end in, to and for itself. The man has been persuaded that it is a good thing to read, and so he reads, perhaps the same number of pages every day, only for the sake of getting through them without missing a word. He might just as well give the same time to twiddling his fingers. Nay, better, for he could not by any means keep this up for long, whereas many people, especially

ladies, stick to the other for a lifetime. Faith works wonders, but even faith is thrown away on this wretchedly-mechanical task work. The folk might as soon look for sweet sounds from a cracked pot, or works of charity from turning the crank in a jail. Staring through a lot of letters scarcely deserves the name of reading, unless the reader is a child on the lowest bench at an infant school. It is such fearful drudgery, and needs such a painful struggle to keep it up, that the merest hint of its utter worthlessness is surely enough to hinder any one from ever trying it again.

It is sometimes resorted to by University men, who have made up their minds to read a certain number of hours a day, but are done up before they have ended the time fixed. If they are often tempted to fall back on this lazy, groveling, earth-born outlet from a praiseworthy resolution, let them at once lessen the number of hours they have allotted to reading. They had better read for five minutes with understanding, or at least with a trial at it, than pore over pages mechanically all the days of their lives.

IV. THE CASE OF A MAN WHO REALLY SEEKS HIS OWN GOOD AS A THINKING BEING, BUT TAKES NO SETTLED ROAD FOR ITS DISCOVERY.

This is both a common and a sad case. It is a fall on the very threshold. The poor wretch lies flounder-

ing on the door-sill of the house of wisdom. This case was my own. From my earliest years, I had been fond, to a fault, of reading. I had devoured every book that came in my way. The larger my stores became, I was the more unhappy. An endless peevishness and craving drove me again and again to seek for more knowledge. This goaded me afresh to the study of the most out-of-the-way books. I went about in heaviness, and was weary all the day long. I was at last persuaded that books could not do it, so I gave them all up. I threw away all my chances of gaining knowledge just as zealously as I had sought them before. This brought me more into contact with nature, with myself, and with my fellow-men. Earnest thought followed. I saw the loveliness of discipline. I observed that of nature. I walked the same paths in reading as those by which nature guides us through life. I perceived that it is just as needful to limit the number of one's acquaintances among books as among men. I breathed freely for the first time. It was a new birth. I was able to make my own all that came in my way, and even to seek for more.

THIS ENTIRE WANT OF PLAN IS A GLARING MARK OF THE STUDIES IN OUR UNIVERSITIES. NO ONE GIVES A HINT TO THE RAW STUDENT HOW TO READ. He is left to find this out for himself. He fails, for he has not yet lived through enough to enable

him to make such a trial with any hope of success. His failure is in doing too much, or too little, or nothing at all; most often the latter. If he is an able man he tries to find out afresh for himself everything about which he reads. He forgets that what was given to the discoverers, before they had any chance of succeeding, must needs have been very much other than what has been given to him. It is therefore very unlikely that any good will come of his lonely sweating to follow in their steps. He is unfavorably placed for taking such a task in hand. Whereas, there are undoubtedly new things to be done, for which he is well fitted, if his short-sightedness would only allow him to look for them. If he is a clever man, he sees clearly the good of getting mere knowledge, and his study step by step becomes only a cramming by steam. This case is again met with under the next head.

These evils have not escaped the notice of many of the literary masters of the day; for they tell us a book should mostly be read more than once. They say, "A book once read is a book not read;" "A book not worth reading more than once is not worth reading at all;" "Much but not many;" "Outsidedness is the crying evil of all reading now-a-days;" and so on. But not a man of them all puts before us any fixed number of times that a book should be read, nor tries

to point out any unlikeness in the aims of the different readings.

V. THE CASE OF A MAN WHOSE ONLY AIM IS TO GET A KNOWLEDGE OF A BOOK.

This is the most common fault of clever men. They very soon find that by shortening the time which ought to be given up to shaping clear and distinct ideas of the author's meaning, there is great room left for taking to themselves a knowledge which is only a burden to the memory. This answers their ends in the world, and in examinations of outsides, such as are the greater number. This cramped knowledge is cram, the baneful fruit of the overtillage of a narrow field. Its growth may be greatly choked by setting papers, not merely in parrot-work, but testing the student's ability to do, or find out, something of his own. But it is a sorrowful truth, that even on such papers as these a fair show may be made by one who is solely crammed to that end, and is nevertheless quite blind to the rights and grounds of each kind of skill. See how soon such finger-work falls away. It is run up much too fast to stand long. Such slight walls are all but worthless to shelter us through life. An examination is looked upon with the same feeling of disgust by the highest and by the lowest kinds of men; by those who can bring forth of their own, and by those who are too helpless even to be able to adopt the offspring of others; by the most

original, and by the most inert of mankind. The latter cannot reach even the low level which the passing of an examination shows to have been attained. The former cannot stop where he gets only such little peeps at the land. The mighty strides of the brilliant man soon outstrip the utmost speed of his dull brother. To the first the examination is less than an end ; to the second it is more. The first sees too much, the second too little, to show to the best advantage before the examiners.

It is, then, plain that examinations are chiefly fitted for the middling sort of minds. And so they ought to be. For this kind is so far the most numerous, that it swells into the most useful class of men. These are nature's petted nurslings. A natural selection has set them apart. The judgment of a Board of Examiners is for them enough to fix their relative places as long as they live. They are not fit to appeal to the higher tribunal of mankind at large. And they therefore need not such a lofty judge. They have fellowship with men like unto themselves, marked with the same brand, and thereby warranted genuine—of their kind. Still, even the keenest of these men must beware, lest in their hurry to climb the tree of knowledge, they lean their ladder on a rotten branch. Let them do their utmost, they cannot climb to the airy abodes of the highfliers. So, instead of gazing after them, they

had better sink their small eyes to see that they do not stumble in their envious haste. They had better give to understanding their author a little more time than is barely enough to enable them to write him out from memory, and to pass uneasily through some stock examples on his general propositions. Wretched are they that make haste to be knowing!

This unrighteous scramble is nevertheless undoubtedly seen in the way of reading usually adopted in Universities. The tutors cut up the text-books into little bits, and warn the student against swallowing one here and one there, by marking them with a great O, meaning omit. Instead of feeding the learners like men, and teaching them to trust to the strength of their own jaws, in chewing what is cooked for them by their brother men, they take a deal of pains to nourish them like children, and starve them after all. It is not as if those who go to a university had only sucking minds. They have been at their food for years, in the infants' school, in the boys' school, and some of them even in the men's school, which is the world. Why, then, are they to be deprived of their knives and forks, and fed upon mincemeat? It is because the passages marked to be omitted were not written merely to be got up. They might for all that contain matter very worthy to be read. And can it be doubted that we are more likely to gain by look-

ing on a book as a whole, agreeably to the aim of the author, than by allowing our mind to be pulled in two ways, for two ends: the one, that of the tutor; the other, that of the man who made the book.

To this it may be reasonably answered, that the text-books of Universities are, in the main, written by other tutors, who made them by dismembering other men's books just as their own are now being torn asunder; that such clippings have no title to be always left in the same places among their fellow-scrap; that as they are more like a sickly, outlandish hash than a whole and wholesome joint, they neither need to be used as a good dish ought, nor are they worthy of such usage.

All this is quite true. These books are valuable aids toward passing well through a competitive examination, but are utterly worthless to any man who aims higher. Let it not be deemed that I am seeking too early to disparage the fiery rage of the present day for examinations. I believe them to be very well fitted for what they are meant to do. Otherwise I should not take the trouble to say a word against them. When I warn the student that the way of reading, which insures him a high place in a competitive examination, is not by any means the best way, let him bear in mind that I herein look toward the training of the man, and not merely of the prize-

man, who is just as singular a monster among men as the prize-pig is among swine.

The greatest praise is due to examinations in that they try men by a fixed standard; and what is tested is found in every man of ordinary ability, and found to such an extent that he can train it up and show it forth, if he likes. But, of course, the more unchangeable the test of what is proved in examination, the less is the worth in each man of what can be tried in such a way. Everybody now looks at the examination-room as a sort of intellectual mint. This has not long been so. Too much value is thus assigned to the coin. This will right itself in time. Remember that the worth of money has steadily lessened, while that of other things has become greater. The most valuable articles are the most variable in price. The worthiest of all have no money value.

VI. THE SUFFERERS WE HAVE HITHERTO MET WERE VICTIMS OF DISEASE IN THE REGION OF THE HEAD. THOSE TO WHOM WE ARE NOW ABOUT TO BE LED ARE AFFLICTED IN THE REALM OF THE HEART.

They are much worthier of our fellow-feeling, and their sufferings are much more grievous. Can anything call more loudly for our pity than the case of a man of a generous turn of mind, and no mean ability, taking a great liking to ideas which he has not under-

stood, linked in propositions that he has not known, and carried out in deeds that cannot gain for him wisdom? Yet, place him beside another who is filled with the most beautiful affections, but at last fails by not allowing them to force him into action. Or compare him with another who is strong in deeds, but acts on no fixed plan, like one who wearies himself by tossing about his legs and arms in the dark. Surely these cases call for our pity not much less loudly than the first. The pains of each are sharper when his disease is got by reading, for the knowledge that is thereby made over to the learner is of the most useless kind, being dribbled through signs, not flowing straight from the things themselves. And even if the reader has formed a correct idea of the things signified, too much activity makes him the frailest of mortals, one who knowingly gives his whole strength to feed the offspring of another's brain. This excess of activity might follow from either of two opposite beginnings. He may have been driven out of the middle way by an overpowering bias; or, feeling bitterly the want of any bias, he may have wrongly sought it in deeds, when he would have found it in thoughts. Howsoever the overweight of deeds arises, the man wastes himself away without leaving behind him anything that will last. The wear and tear that

grinds him down is also untimely. He suffers all the wretchedness of an unripe old age. His pains are owing to his not having found out how he is enthralled. Not knowing how he is shut in, he is ever knocking his head against the walls. Having already frittered away his strength, he is still more weakened by these sad bursts. The highest architectural skill is then given to raising towers in the sand. The loftiest insight is busied in finding birds' nests. A life, which might have left its mark upon mankind, is worn away in an endless treading of his narrow cell. In short the man is mad.

VII. THE CASE OF A MAN WHO FAILS IN THE USE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF DEEDS, A PROBLEM MUCH MORE DIFFICULT THAN THE USE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THOUGHT.

If there is more wisdom than we can make into a part of ourselves it is wasted in the draught, if less we are starved. What signifies it whether we have too many rules of conduct or too few? In the one case we go wrong from losing ourselves in the crowd. In the other we are ever going astray because it happens that among the small number of roads we have discovered, none leads to what we seek. No single author can fit us out against all kinds of luck; nor is he of

much use to us if he is seldom our guide. The only way in which it is likely that we can outrun all these besetting ills, is by a painstaking journey through the first three Stages of Reading.

Then again, as to forming an opinion of an author and uttering it, which is criticism ; there is no author without his bad as well as his good qualities. But it is a great mistake to strain our eyes by keeping them too long fixed either on the one or on the other. A fair number of good points may be kindly dwelt upon, and a few bad ones gently held up as a warning. Either without the other is not enough.

The man who does not find out the mistakes and blunders, is he whose latest opinion is that of the last author he has read. To-day he is warm on one side, to-morrow on the other. No one pays any heed to him in either case. They know that his ways are not his own, and are ever shifting. To his advice they give no ear. He has no weight with his fellow-men.

The other, who has no eye for loveliness, is your shallow, sneering unbeliever. His spirit hunts up doubts and denials. It loathes what is, save only such scraps of waste food as are barely enough to keep body and soul together ; for who can subsist merely on what is not ? He forgets that to bring forward evil is not our chief duty here, though it is of the easiest, for the bad

is manifold, where the good is one. He forgets that we ought to turn the eyes toward that quality which outweighs the others, for it is thereby the thing is best known. In straining our sight to look for the subordinate, we learn to overlook the chief. This is most hurtful to the study of the real. By this way of leaving the more serious qualities for the merest trifles, we are landed among nervousness, low spirits, pedantry, and a whole host of mean ills flowing from an exaggerated attention to littleness. Before a critic opens his mouth to speak evil, let him ask himself this: which of the two, good or evil, herein overweighs the other? If the good overbalances, let him hold his tongue about the bad, until he has shown us of the good, at least as much as he intends to tell us of the evil. If the bad predominates, let him, before uncovering it, teach us what it ought to have been. This is the best way to make the faults plain. The study of evil has no foundation, save in the study of good. How do we teach any branch of knowledge? Not beginning with the blunders which accompanied its growth, but by founding on the purest good it embraces.

Let not the querulous showman of the bad plume himself on his skill in finding it out, as a proof of any wonderful cleverness. It is more often owing to his own fitness and liking for the same. The spots on the

sun can only be seen through darkened glasses. When therefore we meet with any man who is clearly mastered by a desire to find fault, we are warranted in setting down that man as being himself, to say the least, a bad speaker or a bad writer, and we must listen to the good before we give ear to him. If we were guided by him, we should be greatly misled.

VIII. I have now touched lightly upon the simplest of the diseases which come under the common head of a bad way of reading. These have been such as arose from too much, or too little, or none at all of the weightiest marks of the four great stages of study. We must now call to mind that those qualities which distinguish the four periods only overweigh the others, but are not exclusive of them; nay, even, are never found without their opposites. Hence arises a numerous brood of ills. *Of these the most common and the worst is that way of reading in which the whole four chief ends are aimed at in one and the same single and only perusal.* The mere naming of this case is enough to show how bad it is, almost so bad that we can scarcely understand how any man in his senses could allow himself to get into such a state. And yet this is what the greater number of readers are doing all along, throughout the whole of their lives. Those who are

most misled ever seek the new. Those who suffer from a less poisonous form of the plague sometimes read two or more books on the same subject. As each of these works is read in the worst way, it is clear that although we get a little less than if the contents were unlike, we cannot get nearly as much good as by reading one of them in *THE BEST WAY*.

I have said enough to open the eyes of all to the knowledge that there is a good and an evil in reading. I have shown enough to persuade every man of sense to seek safety in *THE BEST WAY*, the only way to flee from the shocking evils pointed out.

Now comes the word of parting. I thank thee, reader, for the gracious hearing thou hast vouchsafed. If I know thee not, at least thou knowest now somewhat of me; and I trust thou art fully persuaded that my aim in speaking with thee has been single toward thy good. I have warned thee of the perils of reading. And I have forearmed as well as forewarned thee. Reading is far from being the highest function of a man. I would earnestly bid thee beware, lest thou torment thyself with too much reading, which is a weariness of the heart and of the brain. Books are only aids for weaklings after all. They are spectacles for the eyes of those that need them. The strong-sighted man sees better with his naked eye. Three books

alone there are that every one must ever study. They are those of nature, man and God. Give to the reading of these thy whole body, mind and soul. They are the only ones written in such a blessed style that he who runs may read.

Du musst steigen oder sinken,
 Du musst herrschen und gewinnen,
 Oder dienen und verlieren,
 Leiden oder triumphiren,
 Amboss oder Hammer sein.—GOETHE.

Old Books.

Old Books.



“Quando omnes loquuntur et deliberant, optimum à mutis mortuis es consilium. Homines quoque, si taceant, vocem venient libri, et quæ nemo dicit, prudens suggerit antiqui.”—*Inscriptio Guelferbylanæ Bibliotheca.*

I must confess I love old Books !

The dearest, too, perhaps most dearly ;
Thick, clumpy tomes, of antique looks,
In pigskin covers fashioned queerly. ❀

Clasped, chained or thonged, stamped quaintly too,
With figures wondrous strange, or holy
Men and women, and cherubs, few
Might well from owls distinguish duly.

I love black-letter books that saw
The light of day at least three hundred
Long years ago ; and look with awe
On works that live, so often plundered.

I love the sacred dust the more
 It clings to ancient lore, enshrining
 Thoughts of the dead, renowned of yore,
 Embalmed in books ; for age declining.

Fit solace, food, and friends most sure
 To have around one, always handy,
 When sinking spirits find no cure,
 In news, election brawls or brandy.

In these old books, more soothing far
 Than balm of Gilead or Nepenthes,
 I seek an antidote for care—
 Of which, most men indeed have plenty

“Five hundred times at least,” I’ve said—
 My wife assures me—“I would never
 Buy more old books ;” yet lists are made,
 And shelves are lumbered more than ever.

Ah ! that our wives could only see
 How well the money is invested
 In these old books, which seem to be
 By them, alas ! so much detested.

There’s nothing hath enduring youth,
 Eternal newness, strength unfailing,
 Except old books, old friends, old truth,
 That’s ever battling—still prevailing.

'Tis better in the past to live,
 Than grovel in the present vilely,
 In clubs, and cliques, where placemen hive,
 And faction hums, and dolts rank highly.

To be enlightened, counseled, led,
 By master minds of former ages,
 Come to old books—consult the dead—
 Commune with silent saints and sages.

Leave me, ye gods ! to my old books—
 Polemics yield to sects that wrangle—
 Vile “parish politics” to folks
 Who love to squabble, scheme and jangle.

Dearly beloved old pigskin tomes !
 Of dingy hue—old bookish darlings !
 Oh, cluster ever round my rooms,
 And banish strifes, disputes and snarlings.

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